

Fellow Australians, it is my melancholy duty to inform you officially that in consequence of a persistence by Germany in her invasion of Poland, Great Britain has declared war upon her and that, as a result, Australia is also at war.

.....

I know that in spite of the emotions we are all feeling, you will show that Australia is ready to see it through. May God in his mercy and compassion grant that the world may soon be delivered from this agony.

My parents and I were at Flinders Street Station. Paper boys were calling out 'Special Edition, Special Edition: war has been declared on Germany'. I was sitting on my dad's shoulders when he said 'Oh no, not again'.

I never felt scared but there was this overwhelming sense that the war was never going to end.

My mother shopped for bargains at the South Melbourne Market, late on Friday nights or at the end of the day on Sundays. I loved the meals she cooked with those cheap cuts of meat. She would make offal, lamb's fry, tripe, kidneys, and ox tail. It was delicious.

Most of the time the war felt really far away. Rationing was hard. There were hardly any toys or treats. It was really hard not knowing when it would all end.

The ration books ran out really fast in our house. Mum sometimes relied on the local 'black market' to get extra supplies to feed our large family. Lots of other people in Port Melbourne did that too.

There were shortages in rubber during the war, so we didn't have tennis balls or footballs. But we still played sports. We used to roll up newspaper into a ball and tie strings around it. We would wet it and the paper would expand into a make-shift football.

Every Friday lunchtime, my friends and I would go and watch the soldiers marching down Swanston Street – heading off to join the war. We had little Australian flags we made to wave and cheer them on. It was quite exciting.

My two older brothers left for the war, they both joined the RAAF.

In Montague we always knew when the troop train was coming through and people would put logs on the tracks to delay it, so the boys could say an extra goodbye.

We would watch the trains going down to Station Pier. Men would throw down letters and notes for their wives and girlfriends. I caught one and delivered it to a woman in South Melbourne.

My father and our two uncles all enlisted in the war. But we never talked about the war at home.

My parents talked about the war with me. When I asked my mother questions about what I had heard, she would get out a newspaper to connect what I'd heard on the radio with what was happening. She also showed me maps and photos.

I was very scared. I remember hearing the drone of planes overhead and Mum saying it was only the seagulls. But I knew that it wasn't.

You heard people talking, they thought you weren't listening, but you knew. Sometimes we didn't understand it all and we'd get frightened.

My father enlisted in the war. He used to write to me and say how much he was looking forward to hearing me play a particular piece of music on the piano. I was really worried he

would be disappointed I couldn't play it, because I was more interested in playing hockey than practising piano.
My dad decided to dig a shelter in our backyard. My cousin was watching and yelled out to Dad just in time to my Dad put his pickaxe through the sewage pipe!
When you saw the telegram boy coming down the road, you knew it was bad news. Everybody knew.
Every Sunday night we would all sit around the kitchen table and listen to the stories or plays on the wireless. That was a real treat.
We lived on Gladstone Street. My mother would make a pot of pea soup every Sunday. Any of the local men who were home for a visit knew they were welcome to drop in and have a bowl. She often took packages and food to the training camp up at Puckapunyule.
I would knit scarves for war effort and can remember practising drills for air raids, marching across the oval to the trench at the back of Nott Street school.
We had to get into trenches to do drills at school. I actually had my first kiss in those trenches, during a drill in grade five! I was so surprised when it happened!
My friends and I used to enjoy playing in the air raid trenches at Crichton Reserve.
Mum wouldn't let my sister and I near the air raid shelters on Raglan Street. She said that bad men would hang around there.
My dad was the local air raid warden for Montague. He walked along the street with his special warden's hat and armband. He would blow his whistle to call people out to the street and teach them about how to handle fires. I used to help him. I remember us being in the middle of the road in Buckhurst Street.
We moved to Elwood during the war. I would help my mother with her First Aid and Home Nursing course - winding bandages in the living room. I even volunteered as a patient during training days, lying on the ground while Mother demonstrated bandaging techniques.
My dad worked as a proofreader for the Age. During the war years he was asked to report on the Victorian football games. I would go with him to the games. Then, on Sunday mornings it was my job to ride my bike to South Melbourne station and hand in the reports to the train guard who would then deliver them to <i>The Age</i> .
I started my first job at 15. I had to learn it all in a week because so many of the other staff members were going off to enlist in the war.
It is our privilege tonight to introduce the prime minister, the Honourable John Curtin. Ladies and gentlemen, the prime minister. Men and women of Australia, we are at war with Japan. ... For the first time in the history of the Pacific, armed conflict stalks abroad. One thing remains, and on it depends our very lives. That thing is the cooperation, the strength, and the willpower of you, the people of the Commonwealth. Without it, we are indeed lost. Men and women of Australia: The call is to you, for your courage; your physical and mental ability; your inflexible determination that we, as a nation of free people, shall survive. My appeal to you is in the name of Australia, for Australia is the stake in this conflict. The thread of peace has snapped – only the valour of our fighting forces, backed by the very uttermost of which we are capable in factory and workshop, can knit that thread again into security. Let there be no idle hand. The road of service is ahead. Let us all tread it firmly, victoriously.

I remember that day. We were crossing Port Phillip Bay. The band that was playing on the paddle steamer suddenly stopped and the captain announced that Australia was at war with Japan. That was the day Jack and I fell in love.

We were given a haversack at school one day and told to go home and pack a change of clothes and toiletries. We had a form we had to get our parents to sign in case we were told to evacuate to the country while we were at school. We practised marching from school to the train station.

I don't know if my mother thought the Japanese were going to march down Nightingale Street where we lived, but she refused to sign the form. Instead, she took my brother and me away to Mount Evelyn, which was only about 20 miles from St Kilda!

One night my father came home late from work and told me to come outside. I can remember standing on the street in the dark looking up and I saw a plane fly over, right over the top of Dunlops and the railway station. It had a big red sun on the side. My father said don't tell anyone at school about this.

When they thought the Japanese were coming, we weren't allowed to have any lights on at night. We covered the windows with paper because we were close to the Port. My sister and I slept together in a big bed and we were scared of the dark.

We lived next door to a former South Melbourne footballer, Len Thomas. I can still see that day in my mind. The day we were told he was killed. It was like the Japanese were suddenly just up the street. I had no idea of geography, but New Guinea seemed really close. That was the only time I was scared, realising that his kids, Barry and Lynette, now had no father.

My sister and I along with our brother and sister were sent to Mount Evelyn to live with our Grandmother while Mum stayed behind in Port Melbourne.

I can remember being very scared that Japanese would invade. My cousin and I made a plan to run away if they did. We loaded up our toys and dolls into a cart with socks and shoes, although we didn't pack any food!

I remember hearing about the Japanese submarine in Sydney Harbour. That was really scary.

I started working for the Army when I was 15.

The thought of a Japanese invasion was a vague concept and hard to really imagine happening. On the other hand, knowing there was a murderer killing women in Albert Park and near where I lived, was very real. I was very uneasy about that. Because we worked long hours and would often leave after dark, the army would organise cars or taxis to take us home during that time.

We always walked there, right along Acland Street, and there would always be a long queue of American soldiers with their girlfriends waiting to get into the Galleon Coffee Lounge. Many of them would use the wait time to get more familiar with each other, making the most of their time together. As a young girl, I was spellbound!

I went up to Bay Street from school, at lunchtime, and I remember seeing all the American troops marching down Bay Street towards the Port Melbourne football ground. They were yelling out to the women on the street, 'Where are we?' because they had got straight off the ship and had no idea where they had arrived!

The American soldiers were just larger than life. I'd only ever seen Americans in films and suddenly they were everywhere in St Kilda. Sometimes they would share chewing gum or Coca-cola with us local kids.

I remember coming home from school one day and going into my room as normal. Suddenly I saw a pair of feet sticking out from under my bed. I ran screaming from the room, only to learn it was my brother, home on leave from the army, playing a trick on me.

[Music]

Ladies and Gentlemen, the Prime Minister of the Commonwealth of Australia Mr J B Chifley

Fellow citizens, the war is over.

...

Let us remember those whose lives were given that we may enjoy this glorious moment and may look forward to a peace which they have won for us.

I remember we rushed up to get the bus into the city. It was absolute chaos. People were very happy, running around, dancing and singing.

There were so many people dancing in front of Flinders Street Station that there were no trams in sight. I remember having to fight my way through the crowds to get home.

I can remember sirens going off all around Fishermens Bend, cars, trucks and buses all hooting their horns.

We expected everyone overseas to come home the next day of course, but most of them didn't come home for ages.

I can remember climbing on the roof of the house and chalking V for Victory and being surprised that my Dad didn't stop me. There was a lot of joy and partying.

I had an absolute ball. There were thousands of people there, all crowded around Princes Bridge and Flinders Street Station. We laughed, danced, sang, hugged and kissed. It was wonderful.

We weren't told Dad was killed until later. I wasn't told that he was killed in New Guinea until I was about 16. As children we weren't thinking about it because we had a lot of people around us. I can remember Mum crying and we would give her cuddles, and she'd just tell us she would be okay and to go and play.

I remember going to the Astor cinema after the war ended and seeing a short newsreel that showed the evacuation of concentration camps in Europe. It was just horrifying. The whole cinema was silent. We just had no idea what had been happening.

My father spent some time in Heidelberg Repatriation Hospital. I remember walking through the wards and seeing all these men doing strange things. Mum would say to me 'don't stare, they can't help it'. There was one man who was always fishing in a bucket of water. My dad would ask him 'have you caught any fish yet?' and he'd reply, 'they're biting but nothing yet'.

The public were urged to turn up in large numbers for the welcome home. I will never forget that day. The vast crowd were completely silent as the first men were carried from the hospital ship at Port Melbourne and conveyed off the wharf by open-doored ambulances.

The sight of these men who feebly tried to raise their heads, or wave their stick-like arms, reduced the great silent crowd to tears. It was very different from the rah-rah reception we envisaged. It is something that my brother and I have never forgotten.

I would visit the beach at Western Port with my grandmother after the war. There was still barbed wire and deep trenches along the beachfront. I remember finding birds eggs in the trenches, blue ones.

I can't forget the war years and what it was like for me as a child. It's always on my mind.

